

The Liberty



of Egoism

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by E. Horn in Freie Buhne

I

Liberty is power, says Stirner, is might. But what is might here? Might is faculty, and faculty has its root in the will. That we can will is our liberty; but that we cannot always do as we will is our want of liberty. A great deal has been written and said concerning free will; some deny it, some affirm it. This seems to me as if one should speak, for instance, of a rocky cliff. The cliff is rock, and the will is liberty.

To assert the will is to act. Without deed, no will. But whether the deed succeeds is a matter for itself; it does not affect the will; that remains what it is, and renews tomorrow the effort in which it failed today. It is not necessary that it should always succeed—if I only act! But action requires objects and tools; the latter are my physical and mental powers. Failure is explained by the difficulty of the former and the inadequacy of the latter. Here are the barriers of my faculty, not of my volition. If I am conscious of this, I shall not complain of my want of liberty, but, if at all, only of my imperfection. But to complain is unwise, says Epictetus. Rather should I seek to understand the true nature of things and to increase my powers; then the barriers will fall. I shall not, of course, reach after the stars or dash my head against the wall; the really impossible is no barrier to me.

In these barriers there is no compulsion. This I feel only when a foreign force controls me and a foreign will seeks to assert itself through my actions. Against this I revolt, and only when the foreign will has become my own by virtue of my insight, only then shall I not submit myself, but still act in liberty. To do good in consequence of free insight is true virtue, and to act independently true egoism.

Liberty is dominion, says Nietzsche. Let us admit it! Who shall govern? I. Who am I?

And what shall I govern, or rather, what can I govern? That which I know. First of all, I know myself; consequently, self-consciousness directs me to self-control. But myself I know only in antithesis to another; can I govern this also? Yes, if it is not already possessed,—that is, as self-conscious as I am. Men, consequently, who are worthy of the name I cannot govern, because above all others this devolves upon each one himself. As I can teach one only through the understanding which is in him, so I could also govern him only through the will which is in him; but then he is nevertheless a sovereign. Besides

myself, therefore, I can govern only that which cannot govern itself,—that is, animate and inanimate nature. But every person whose self-consciousness is aroused will decline foreign government.

Liberty is consequently self-government and self-control. The former is the subjective, the latter the objective side of sovereignty. Its law-code is very simple. From Aristotle we have the sentence: *Seire est per causas cognoscere*; we might parallel it by *Velle est per causas agere*. Action according to cause and effect only warrants the coherency of my conduct; in it lies the unity of personality and the security of autonomy.

Others shall not govern me. I will be my own master; for, if I am not, I come under the dominion of others. Just get drunk,—that is, relinquish your self-control; there is also an end to your self-government, and boys make sport of you. Only he can be autonomous who bridles himself.

But what do I govern in me? If I am the object, what becomes of the subject? The ego is consequently capable of analysis. I govern my body—*taliter qualiter*, but nevertheless. Consequently it is not essential to the ego; it is an accident. I govern my instincts and passions for the sake of my self-determination; so far as they are rooted in the body, this comes under the above. What can still be governed in me? I am master of my conduct, however, only when I am conscious of my conduct,—that is, when I act logically. But in this I am also master of my reason, as I make use of it. Am I then superior to my thoughts? They come and go, but I seize them, I command them and put them on paper here. But in itself ideation, like feeling, is a passive state; solely active, manifesting my being, realizing myself, and asserting my existence, I am only in volition. What still remains, therefore, of the ego from which I cannot escape? The will. Can I also govern my will? No; for, if I posit it as the object, the subject disappears. My will, that is I. I—will—sovereignty—liberty—life.

The question of free will is futile. The will itself, that is the only liberty of man. In treating of a determinability of the will the will is always confounded with action or individual volition. The end at which the will aims and the *modus agendi*, these are determinable by rational means. But that I act and strive after an end is my liberty.

Am I still superior to my will? Can I make use of it? No, that's meaningless. I act because I am, and I am because I act. Only where I am wholly thrown back on my own resources, where I rest within myself, where I am wholly I, am I free; but this is the case where I will. My will, that is I, that is my liberty, my absoluteness. All else, including also individual aspirations, are relations. But relations bind.

My will is the expression of my existence; it becomes visible in the

manifestation of being, which is identical with the struggle for existence. The question: Must I act? is synonymous with: Must I live?

The will is always present—not the will to live, it is rather itself life,—that is, energy. But it requires aims, objects, in order to assert itself, to express its individuality.

I am attracted by some aim. What does that mean? What are final causes to me? My imagination anticipates the result of an action, it promises pleasure, I consider whether and how I can achieve it, then my will appears on the surface or it does not appear: accordingly I act or do not act.

Pleasure is the food of the will; for the value of every pleasure lies in this,—that it maintains and intensifies activity. But activity is will, is life. It is consequently for its own sake that the will seeks pleasure. But pleasure beckons not only at the end; it begins even with the first step and becomes keener the nearer the end, until it finally reaches its culmination. Then it breaks off, and a new aim allures me.

The will is energy, but strength grows by exercise; consequently the will grows richer by asserting itself. Richer in what? In will. It never consumes itself, but draws ever anew on itself; it is the true perpetuum mobile. Its manifestation is at the same time enjoyment; expenditure and income coincide; the will is self-enjoyment, and to enjoy life is to enjoy one's self.

As man has become through birth and education, so he must act; for that is his being, his being, his ego, his individuality. In this manifestation of his being, in self-realization and self-revelation, lies his life's pleasure and also his life's task.

I consume myself by realizing myself. Compared with this highest pleasure, all other sensual and spiritual pleasures fade away; they are merely means to an end. For this reason the will remains master of the pleasure. If this becomes its own end, without passing into action, the will dies from excess. Then man no longer lives, but vegetates like the cabbage-head in the field. With the will goes liberty, autonomy, self-determination. To be the master of pleasure is self-control (Tolstoy's first step of morality).

Liberty! Do you now know what liberty is? You clamor for it. I tell you: Be free; for you are free! No other liberty can come to you except that which you carry within you. You are you, an ego, a will, wholly for yourselves, resting within yourselves; what more do you want? Is that not liberty enough? Of what more, then, do you want to be free?

Others shall not govern you. Well, it lies with you: govern yourselves and be sovereigns; no other will can then get you in his power; you are nearest to

yourselves. But so you are: as against those above you, you prate and declaim about liberty, because you think not-to-be-ruled is part of it, Anarchists that you are!—and, as against those below you, you exercise force, because you seek liberty in the dominion over others, despots that you are! But how now, if those on top will not listen to you and those below will not be governed? Then continue a slave, Anarchist! Then tremble, despot! How can you be free, if in order to be free, you have need of others? Liberty is not outside of you; this kingdom of heaven is within you!

It is time that many people come to see this, so that they may no longer chase after a phantom. For a hundred years the good have been seeking liberty with the political lantern, and do not see the forest for so many trees. They think liberty is back of the barriers, because the manifestation of their being meets with barriers. But just remove them when, lo! new ones arise.

“He who, instead of the activity of the spirit which moves hidden in his depths, knows and sees only its outward show; who, instead of contemplating himself, continually gathers from far and near a picture of only the outward life and its changes: he remains a slave to time and necessity; what he meditates and thinks bears their impress, is their property, and never, even when he imagines his is contemplating himself, is it permitted him to enter the realm of liberty” (Schleiermacher). Therefore do not frequent the taverns of the world, but remain at home with yourselves; then you are self-conscious and free!

Nor is it anything except self-consciousness to which, after wandering far astray, men rise; they only describe it by other names,—now human dignity, now the libertarian ideal. Many are still sleeping who see liberty in the middle-class competitive struggle for property. But the cock has crowed, and it is beginning to dawn.

My want of liberty, that is the object of my will. No will without deed, but no deed where there are no obstacles to be overcome. These obstacles curtail your liberty? Lazy fellow! They are the very guarantee of your life; for to live is to strive, to work. You are only in so far as you act; and therein precisely consists your liberty,—that you assert yourself as against those obstacles! Only will strongly; that is, be strongly what you are! Your manifestation of being is your struggle for existence.

Sunt certi denique fines—I know that, but should I therefore complain? Therefore precisely I have an individual being, and all being is individual. I console myself and pride myself that I aspire after greater things than I can accomplish. Who can do more than I?

The problem of the freedom of the human will ought not henceforth to

trouble anyone. My will is not free, it is rather my whole freedom. As soon as I have recognized this, I no longer seek liberty, I shall neither beg for it nor steal it from others; for I have it. The self-conscious is the free.

So-called civil liberty reveals itself thus as something wholly inconsequential. If the citizen were free in my sense, he would also have the liberty which he wants; but servility deserves no liberty.

WE

Alone immediately I find myself, me, the free, the self-conscious, the particular individual and owner, as Stirner says. So resting within myself I cast about me, an aspirant as against nature and against other persons. Both are to me objects and therefore also resistances of the volition. To test my selfhood as against them, to assert myself, I take to be the foundation and purpose of my life. I will no longer, I am no longer. But, as long as I will, I am.

Nature appears to me as heterogeneous, strange, puzzling, terrible; men appear to me as homogenous, as of the same essence. The former I seek to explore and put in the service of my will; with the latter I harmonize if they are of the same kind as I,—that is, if will meets will. But revenge is the regulator of the conflicts of the will. Are the other people of the same kind as I,—that is, free, sovereigns? I make a test, and, if I find such, I recognize them as myself, and say: We the free.

We pride ourselves on our liberty, and this pride is our morality: we are on “yonder side of good and bad”.

For morality,— what is it? Nothing surely except the mode of living together, of the intercourse of men. There are consequently very many moral systems, and Bastian’s *Ethnology* will surely yet give us the only true “moral teaching” as descriptive morals. How men have acted and do act we can learn by studying their past conduct; how they will continue to act we can infer from their—that is, our—character, which is selfishness. But who tells us, and who has a right to tell us, how we shall act? Is there a need of “morality” in this sense? Nietzsche justly makes of this morality itself a problem.

Slaves receive precepts of conduct; the free is his own lawgiver. Each one learns of his “ethical destiny” immediately through his “conscience”—is Fichte’s opinion, and Sommer, in controversy with Wundt, erects thereon a plausible philosophy of life. All “moral systems” presuppose the unfree, and because liberty is in such a plight today,—St. Manchester has betrayed and sold it,—the unbelieving world prates so much about ethics.

We the free have no need of “morality”. Our mutual respect and recognition

is only the result of our pride,— that is, the appreciation of our own ego,— and the principle of our conduct is selfishness. The free govern themselves, because each individual is his own sovereign. This does not preclude the election by them of a *primus inter jures*, but they dispense with the guardianship of “governors” and “proprietors”. Outward, politico-social liberty is only the reflection of inner, personal liberty. Inner liberty demands Anarchy. We the free are Anarchists, because we are sovereigns and do not require the government of others. Not overmen are we; we only do not wish to be undermen.

Not all men are free in our sense. For ages slavery has existed on the earth, and slavery produces a servile spirit which transmits itself. But all are destined for liberty. What is the relation of the free to the unfree? He does not recognize them as his equals; they are beneath him. He uses them, if he does not ignore them; for he has no need of them. He does not share their feelings. They receive from him their “good” and “bad”,— a thing unknown to the free. He treats them with pride, as all his conduct betrays a proud spirit. He might say of himself: *Odi profanum vulgus et abscis*, but he does not say it. For the more he esteems himself as the free, the more he slights those who are not what by their human form they ought to be,—the unfree, the cowardly, the base. Here meet the great contempt and the great pity.

We the free are the pure egoists, such as Stirner demands. And it is precisely this egoism which unites us, paradoxical as it may sound. Our socialism is only an extended egoism; for what we concede to one another in the shape of honors and rights returns to each individual.

But what becomes then of the task of humanity? Aye, what becomes of it? Where is it? Who sets it? What is its name? We must labor for the commonweal, we must espouse the cause of progress—who thinks so? Each labors, thinks, and creates as the spirit moves him. Life is not, as Dühring writes, “essentially an epitome of sensations, feelings, and emotions”, but essentially activity, will, manifestation of being, self-realization of the individual. Whether this is instinctive or conscious is immaterial; for the unconscious as the conscious sense “is only a part of that force which guarantees the unity of things”. This from Dühring is true also of the work of the individual: “But also in the domain of social formations the creative forces actually have not the form of conscious ends; they are rather efficient causes, which impel the formations whose meaning reason never grasps at once”. So the free works in accordance with his nature, because he must—or what is the same thing with him—because he wills. The pressure of life impels him, and the will is his life. It is possible that his thoughts and deeds work a benefit to mankind; experience teaches that this has often been the case. But “to espouse the cause of progress” is nevertheless a postulate a posteriori and wholly incapable of generalization and extension to all men. And “the commonweal,” says Stirner justly, “is not my weal; but I want my weal”. In the so-called commonweal

everybody, not only the thief and the beggar and all the unfree, but also the free himself, seeks his weal. Therefore it is neither a virtue nor a duty to work for the commonweal. Nevertheless this work will not remain undone; the common egoism of the unfree as well as the nobler egoism of the free will see to that. But the saying: *Aliis inserviando consumor* is folly if I am not myself benefited thereby.

--We the free, -- there is still another bond which unites us besides that inner bond of mutual respect and recognition; it is that of our common dependence on nature in respect to the struggle for existence, and our common need of it in regard to the manifestation of being.

That dependence we share with all living creatures, but the free, the proud, revolt against it, and in their displeasure consume themselves when sickness compels them to inaction. Therefore all their thinking and striving is directed toward lessening this dependence,—that is, toward exploring nature and placing it under their dominion. Science is a matter of free spirits. The food instinct compels indeed also the unfree to work upon nature, but the free do not aim merely at securing material prosperity; to them nature with all its manifestations, including human society, is rather the objective point for the realization of liberty; they work indeed also in order to live, but also because they live. Their will demands an object upon which it may spend itself. And the free knows what he wants. So it is not alone the distress of life, but also the joy of creating which unites the free spirits. We the free are the true Socialists, and we solve the social problem as far as it may be solved. Our sense of liberty, our pride, revolts at the sight of social misery and human helplessness, but our love of knowledge and our love of work searches for relief. For the misery of men is the enemy of their liberty, because in the long run it lends to paralysis of the will. But this is to be considered as on a par with death. If we combat misery, we combat the want of liberty and make men of men.

But the free whom I have in mind, where are they? They are among all classes of society—virtually, but also actually. They are not indeed the men of “wealth and culture”, not the upper ten who today constitute the so-called “State”, nor am I in search after Nietzsche’s masters who are unfree because—even as the word implies—they need slaves. But they exist, the free, Gutzkow’s knights of the spirit, scattered among the masses of the unfree. The task is to gather them, they will meet, events will bring them to the surface, and they will build the future.

Today there is no liberty in the State; bureaucracy rules, and the bourse, the statute-book, and the money-bag, fortified and protected by laws in the multiplicity of which wisdom is made foolish. The more laws men give themselves the less free they are, and vice versa. The statute-book rules,—that is, the dependence of the living spirit on the dead letter. They money-bag rules,—that

is, the material sense which seeks the wealth and the worth of life not in a sum of deeds, but in a sum of pleasures. "A mighty stream of beer," exclaims Antonius von der Linde, "washes all idealism from Germany." And things threaten to become rather worse than better; for a new despotism is rising with the promise of superseding the others.

Aetas parentum pejor avis tulit

Noe nequiores, nox daturos

Progeniem vitiosorem.

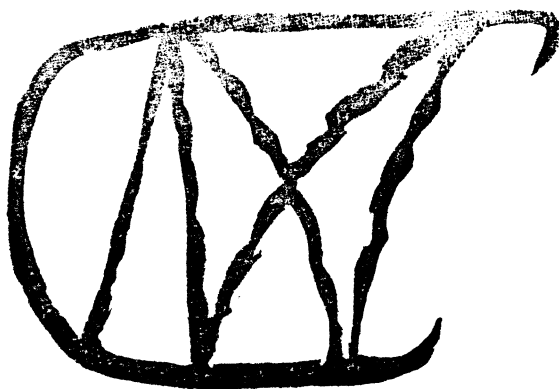
The cause of the free does not prosper today,

but they remain quiet and bide their time.

What changes the time? Absolutism. Our bourgeoisie has long deserved it, and the rising elements need a strong arm that they may not cast out the devil by Beelzebub. All progress hitherto has proceeded from exemplary persons. Of such there is again need, in order that, by the example of this free spirit, this aspirant, people learn to bethink themselves of their liberty, of their will, and become what they must be—the free.

This will not happen so very soon. It is possible, because better, that the dregs of the prevailing want of liberty will first be destroyed in a forty years' wandering in the wilderness. But then the free will gather, and their number will increase under the influence of liberty.

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